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 GO GREEN project based learning has long term effects!

“May I have your garbage can please? We’re going to weigh your garbage.” An odd request from a second grader. Then I remembered; it must be part of their going green initiative.

It all began in 2014 when teachers Mary Kiffney and Brenda Brush, along with their first, second and third graders, embarked on project based learning. Project based learning is a methodology in which student driven inquiry drives learning and meaningful topics are addressed and acted upon. The young students wanted to know, as young environmentalists, how they could make Levey a greener school. As Anna, now in grade 4, put it, “We decided we could help to save the world from the greenhouse effect.” In both general and Judaic studies they had learned about Tikkun Olam- repairing the world.

And so it began. They did research; presented their findings in class, and then to a panel of experts including board members, faculty and sustainability workers. They had a visit from Ecomaine and considered projects which might be achievable. Charlotte, now in grade 4, commented “I liked it when we shared in front of experts. We had a recycling expert, a high school teacher, and a scientist.” The students also got to visit WCLZ to learn about their carbon neutral practices and talk on the radio.

Before the school year ended they had identified several goals and items to procure:

* They wanted to plant a tree to help absorb CO2 (a greenhouse gas) and produce O2 thus cleaning the air.
* They wanted to put in a bike rack to encourage less use of cars and gasoline.
* They wanted to encourage composting to reduce lunch and food waste.
* They wanted to install a rain barrel to use for watering our school gardens, reducing water use.
* They wanted to get or make solar chargers, to charge the iPads at school.
* They wanted to sell reusable mugs and containers and ban styrofoam use in our school.

Next they strategized. Involving our landlords, Temple Beth El, would be helpful. Would they let us put the compost on the campus? Could we install a bike rack?

And we needed money for purchases and membership in Garbage to Garden. Beginning in Sept of 2014, the students continued their enthusiasm. They met with the TBE administrators and got permission to pursue some of their projects. They planned and sponsored a “GO GREEN” fundraiser for which they baked, made crafts and drawings. The students raised $200 from friends and families at the fundraiser.

Madeline, a 3rd grader, shared this, “My group is wanting to get bike racks. When you drive a car you create smoke which is bad for the environment. When you ride your bike- no smoke!”

Back to the garbage project….. they measured and weighed our daily trash output, to compare with the different when we begin composting. This is an example of how project based learning includes math, communication skills, critical thinking and other 21st century skills. The teachers applied for two grants to help fund the ongoing projects, and received one small one. In addition they designed a “go Green” water bottle and sold them along with bake sale items to make money to fund their initiatives. We can only see a greater and greener future!

This year the changes that the project made are just part of our school. We use “garbage to garden” to make compost. We use our bike rack. And our rain barrel. We don’t use Styrofoam, and always think about recycling and reducing waste. The tree that was planted is growing, as are our students.

While Brenda and Mary are no longer full time teachers with us (they do tutor a few of our students as they are working as independent contractors; their projects live on.

Levey Day School is a school with small classes and which features strong academics, arts and physical education, mixed with a values based and project based thematic curriculum. We believe no child is too young to promote meaningful change. For more information on our GO GREEN initiative or Levey Day School, contact us!